

# *10 Concrete Steps for Working with At-Risk Youth*

The next time you are tempted to:

yell at a kid;  
blame a kid;  
make fun of a kid;

kick a kid out of your class;  
be sarcastic with a kid  
give up on a kid;

I want you to think of the last time this has happened to you. You have a choice. What you do defines who you are as a teacher. You can react on your feelings or you can try this 10 step plan.

1. **Stop.** or at least slow down.
2. **Think.** Take a few seconds to think about what you are feeling. Don't react.
3. **Don't take it personal.** It's not about you! Don't take what your students say and do personally.
4. **Don't blame the student.** It's not their fault they were raped, beaten, or told they were stupid and worthless.
5. **Don't call them names.** Don't pile on negative reinforcements. Sarcasm and name-calling doesn't work. They should never hear this from a professional.
6. **Don't expect them to immediately trust you.** Show them that you care – again and again and again. It takes over a year of your consistent high expectations, consistent caring, and consistent positive role modeling to instill trust and confidence.
7. **Give them encouragement and positive reinforcement.** Tell them they are brilliant, creative, and imaginative. Help them to believe in themselves again.
8. **Don't tell them their problem is not a big deal.** If a student talks to you, it's important. Validate their feelings.
9. **Help your students know themselves.** Ask questions, show interest. Help them discover what causes their feelings of sadness, anger, and frustration that affect their behavior.
10. **Never give up.** If you have to go back to Step 1 do it, but never give up.

